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THE GENTLE ART OF SWIPING

Swiping is so common these days that we tend to take it for granted. Much of the time it is unconscious and rather innocent, but it is often deliberate. We all read a lot and watch a lot of tv and see more movies than we really need to see and all of this material is programmed into our brains so that when we set down to do our own writing or drawing it is natural for the program to play itself out in our own work. Usually, this is not serious, but it can be. Most of the major movie makers, writers, and artists working today have been sued for plagiarism, many of them more than once. Such lawsuits are generally settled out of court for much smaller amounts than the suit, but they are as real to the pros in the business as malpractice suits to the doctors and surgeons.

Well, so what? Hey, man, everybody has a swipe file. Is there a cartoonist working who hasn't swiped a gag now and then? We all read MAD or NATLAMP, CRACKED or CRAZY, HUSTLER HUMOR and PLAYBOY, and those gags drift into our consciousness. Months, even years later, we sit down to draw a cartoon, thinking it is a brilliant idea we just came up with, and, when possible, we sell it. Embarassing when we find out later on, by a chance re-reading of an old NATLAMP that we have swiped someone else's gag. HE may have swiped it, too, but we still feel a little bit disappointed that our own brilliance was really belated memory.

But, hey, you didn't even know about swiping, right? Didn't know that most working cartoonists keep what they call SWIPE FILES, that many of the guys who have to grind out monthly superhero stuff just whip out a standard pose from the file and put it on the old trace board, pencil it in on the art, and hurry on to someone they are really interested in working out. Who is going to spend a lot of time on assembly line art? Not everyone does this, naturally; there are people who re-draw that stuff over and over, indeed, there are guys who have drawn this or that super character so often they could do one while eating their lox an' bagels. It is likely that the most swiping is done by the newer cartoonists.

Now, I wouldn't want you to think there weren't some calculating plagiarists out there, out to make all the bucks they can off someone else's ideas and labor, because there are a hell of a lot of those people around in the Reagan Era. It's very blatant in television where it has become almost company policy to swipe the latest best-sellers, make duplicate versions of them for tv, and run them long before the authorized film version has hit the malls. Each adventure series repeats the last with the stunts updated to include the latest in jazzy electronics and latex. When Glen Larson did the BIONIC WOMAN series to follow up the successful BIONIC MAN, his company often used the exact scripts over again. It's a lot cheaper and easier to remake than to do everything fresh. The stunts are all blocked out and planned and the dialogue is trivial anyway. Some of those same plots went through AUTOMAN and are now recycling through THE WIZARD, so if you don't know them by heart by now, stick to your tube.

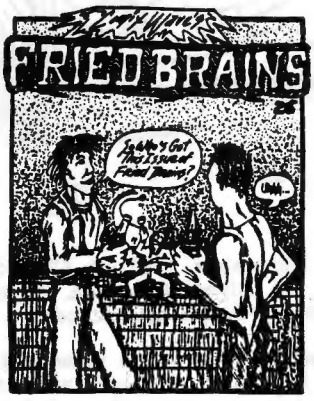
Plagiarism is hard to prove. Ideas cannot be copyrighted and neither can titles. This means there are a lot of ideas in art and prose which are basically the same; what differs is the treatment. It is a very different experience seeing Berni Wrightson's FRANKENSTEIN than it is reading the 1819 novel by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, but the idea and the story are the same. Compare the James Whale film with Boris Karloff and the gory 3-D Frankenstein done by Andy Warhol then make the leap to THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW; see how it works? One idea. Many different interpretations and versions.

It doesn't mean you're an evil person if you come up with someone else's idea; maybe you did it better, but it does put you in an awkward position with other creative people who may tend to see you as nothing but a swiper, an imitator with no original ideas or concepts.

Influence is a different matter. Everyday, I see ads in the magazines and on television which I know to be influenced by cartoonists like Jack Davis and Wallace Wood and Jules Feiffer. This does not mean that the artists are being ripped off or their ideas and style plagiarized; it means that they were so damned good at what they did that most of those who follow cannot help but draw a lot like them until they find their own particular style. Why, after all, would someone starting out in the business want to imitate the worst instead of the best?

CLAY GEERDES/9-25-86

WAAAAH! I'M TELLIN' MY DADDY ON YOU... HE'S A NEWSPAPERMAN!
I'M SHAKIN' KID... LISTEN GIRL, CAN'T YOU SHUT THAT BRAT UP?!
HERE'S A PHOTO OF MY HUSBAND.
BRAT! WELL BE ALRIGHT, WE JUST NEED SOMETHING TO CALM HIM.
WAAAAH! MY DADDY'S GOT NO HAIR, HE HIT YOU PAPPY... YOU GO TO VET, GET FIXED UP
I GOT A PACIFIER RIGHT HERE.... YOU OR ME?
HA HA HA WHAT A DELIGHTFUL SENSE OF HUMOUR YOU HAVE.
TEDDY!!
WHO'S KIDDIN'?
NO TEDDY IS THE ONLY THING IN THE WORLD THAT CALMS THE LITTLE TERROR DOWN.



WILD ROBOTS! THE PLACE IS CRAWLING WITH 'EM!
YAHOO! LET'S NAIL THEIR BUTTS!
SKRAWK!
ZAP!
PLEASE CALM YOURSELF, OFFICER!
KILL! BASH! KREEGAH!
SKRAWK!
ZOT!
HOW COME MIGHTY MOUSE IS NEVER AROUND WHEN YOU COULD REALLY USE HIM?

COMIX PLUGOLA

Most of the comix mentioned these days are G rated, but some may not be, so it's a good idea to include an age statement with any order to anyone and save time.* The latest from COMIX WAVE: A collection of Par Holman's art (see ad below), and his latest 1987 mini: ONE NUKE CAN RUIN YOUR DAY! (50¢/stamp). FRIED BRAINS 26 with art by Sheridan, Morris, and Sloane, 50¢/stamp. FAN'TOONS 17 is available from Edd Vick for $1.39. 5014-D Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105.* MISC COMICS #21 is $1.50 from Randy Paske, 656 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 55741-9631.* THE WORKER POET 11 is $2 from Michael Hill, 327 Pacific St., Franklin, PA 16323. MODERN MAN 2 is 75¢. Send Mike some stamps for post.* COLOR MY TOTEM is 50¢/stamp from Mary Fleener, 309 Oceanview, Encinitas, CA 92024.* Three nice ones from Renegade: ROSCOE THE DAWG 1 (Panel top right), RENEGADE ROMANCE (top left), and Brad Foster's MECHTHINGS 1.* San Diego Con coverage has been cancelled. C.G.

PAR HOLMAN'S SECRET FILES,
a 16 page digestzine from **COMIX WAVE**
$2.00 PP. BOX 7081, BERKELEY, CA 94707